



History uncovered at Redstone Arsenal cemeteries

by Kelley Lane

Often when a community and its inhabitants have died, the stories of their lives go with them. They leave behind the carefully placed monuments at cemeteries as proof of their existence. These carved stone spires say little -- names, dates and the occasional inscription. They only hint at the lives they represent. Redstone is full of such hints at the past.

Long before the Army took up residence, the area that would become Redstone Arsenal was made up of small communities of various sizes and origins. People were born here. They lived their lives here. They died here. Over the years, one or two graves became small family and community cemeteries. The oldest recorded date goes back to 1820. There are about 48 of these cemeteries scattered across

Redstone. While the number may raise the eyebrows, volunteer John Rankin says that is not an unusual amount, given the size of the Arsenal.

"We have over 50 square miles of Arsenal property and that's less than one cemetery per square mile," Rankin said. "If you look at a plot of Madison County, that's not unusual to have at least one cemetery per square mile. That's not an unusual density at all. It's about average."

The Environmental Office is responsible for the welfare of these graveyards. Besides ensuring that the grounds are maintained, the staff tries to research the history behind the families and individuals interred here. Public records are perused to find clues to the bigger stories behind the two or three lines etched in stone. When a

living descendant is available, they conduct interviews to fill in the gaps in information. The long-term goal is to put together a report or resource for information about the cemeteries and their residents, but completion of such a goal is not expected for another two years or so, because of the amount of work that must go into every entry. The research is still an ongoing process.

The people buried on Redstone may be quiet, but they are not silent. Each tells a story. Some are inspirational tales of free black farmers who raised their families in prosperity alongside white plantations. Others speak of Revolutionary War soldiers, who settled here to enjoy the freedom



Beverly Curry listens as Phyllis Montgomery tells the story of Schatzi, her beloved dog, buried in Redstone's pet cemetery.

Photo by Kellye Lane

they had fought so hard for. Some are strange and almost funny. Other graves hint at mysteries.

One cemetery at Redstone is still in use. It is the pet cemetery. There, people pay loving tribute to the animals that were a part of their lives. The grave markers range in age and style. Some are simple wooden plaques. Others are carved stones bearing names, dates and occasionally, the story of an animal's life.

The presence of these former residents of Redstone speaks to the richness of history in the Redstone and Huntsville community. They are silent reminders of the roots of this community. Uncovering the history of these people and pets is a great commitment, and one the Environmental Office takes seriously. If you are the descendant of or have information about a person or a pet interred on the Arsenal, please call Beverly Curry at (256) 955-6971 or e-mail her at beverly.curry@redstone.army.mil.

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Lacy Cemetery, 75-1, Redstone Arsenal, Madison Co., AL, May 1, 2003. Box crypt of Prudence Kasandrea Howell in background; stone for Jane S. Davies mysteriously buried.